



Jeep Ambulance in the Korean War, ca. 1951 (BUMED Archives)

DR. FRENCH MOORE & THE ADVENT OF THE NAVY'S JEEP AMBULANCE

By André B. Sobocinski

Historian, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

World War II's Pacific battlefields spurred a need for versatile vehicles capable of transporting casualties across rugged terrain. Throughout the war, the Army and Navy had typically turned to the Dodge Model ¾ ton truck as a "field ambulance" for overseas operations. According to reports, the Dodge was "least likely to produce shocks over rough roads," carried four litters, "protected patients from the rain and dust" and was even equipped with a heater to keep wounded personnel warm.¹ But the Dodge had its drawbacks. It was a cumbersome vehicle and not known for its maneuverability.²

Enter the Navy-designed Jeep ambulance.



With two patients aboard, a Corpsman administering plasma, a driver, and a Marine "riding shotgun," Jeep ambulances often provided the only quick evacuation to the beach, 1945 (BUMED Archives)

The Willys Jeep was first produced in 1941 for the U.S. military as a dependable off-road, "general purpose" vehicle. Depending on the source, its name was taken as a derivation of "G.P" or inspired by a comic strip character of E.C. Segar (creator of "Popeye the Sailor").³

In March 1942, Lt. Cmdr. French Moore (1897-1983), a battalion surgeon with the 2d Medical Battalion, 2d Marine Division at Camp Elliott, Calif., saw the Jeep as the perfect "light field ambulance" that could be used in combat areas as well as overseas bases and training centers. Jeeps were more compact, easier to load and unload than the Dodge model and offered a greater range of maneuverability between the area of combat and the collecting station. It could travel at an average of ten miles per hour and carry up to "35 patients 1,000 yards and return in an hour."⁴ The Jeep was also more economical and could be easily altered.



*Jeep Turns Ambulance
Kerr Eby #43
Pastel drawing, 1943
Navy Art Gallery*

In creating the prototype for the Jeep ambulance, Moore removed the vehicle's canvas top, windshield, right front seat and turned around the rear seat to run "fore and aft" behind the driver's seat allowing space for two Stokes stretchers and two sitting wounded.⁵ After extensive experimentation, Moore submitted blueprints, and a record of performance of his prototype to the Marine Corps Commandant, Lt. Gen. Thomas Holcomb. It was approved for use in time for the Solomon Islands Campaign.⁶

Moore would deploy to Guadalcanal in January 1943 along with seven of his Jeep ambulances.⁷ He would make daily trips aboard the Jeeps to the

frontlines, supervising administration of plasma, application of suppressive malarial treatments and “speedy” evacuation to the field hospitals.

Moore’s Jeep ambulance would later be used on the battlefields of Tarawa, Peleliu, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. According to reports, Jeep ambulances on Iwo Jima “proved themselves the most valuable single piece of motor transport in the medical organization” and were used to haul thousands of casualties in that operation.⁸

Moore would receive the Letter of Commendation for “skill, initiative, and foresightedness” in connection with the development of the Jeep Ambulance. Variations of his innovative ambulance would later be used effectively in the Korean War and Vietnam.⁹

After the war Moore would serve multiple tours as executive officers of naval hospitals before assuming command of Naval Hospital Newport, R.I. and then serving as Inspector General of the Medical Department.

Sources:

1. BUMED History Division. “Okinawa.” *S. Navy Medical Department Administrative History*. Vol. 1, Chapter XII, p13-14.
2. Moore, French. CO, 2d Medical Battalion, 2d Marine Division, FMF, Camp Elliott, Calif. to Commandant, USMC. 11 March 1942. N-33-3. Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Record Group (52) National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Md.
3. The term “Jeep” predicated the automobile of the same name and had been used throughout the 1930s to refer to everything from tanks to soldiers. Although not substantiated, the term “jeep” is said to have derived from “G.P.” an abbreviation for “General Purpose.” In March 1936, the character “Eugene the Jeep” first appeared in E.C. Segar’s comic strip *Thimble Theater*. Purportedly, Jeep vehicles in World War II were sometimes referred by the name “Eugene.” (Source: Wilton, David. “Jeep.” www.Wordorigins.org)
4. Moore, French. CO, 2d Medical Battalion, 2d Marine Division, FMF, Camp Elliott, Calif. to Commandant, USMC. 11 March 1942. N-33-3. Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Record Group (52) National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Md.
5. Moore, French. CO, 2d Medical Battalion, 2d Marine Division, FMF, Camp Elliott, Calif. to Capt. Carlton Andrus, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. 17 March 1942. N-33-3. Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

Record Group (52) National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Md.

6. Arthur, J.M. CO, HQ, 2d Marines Reinforced, to Vice Adm. Ross McIntire, Chief of BUMED. January 17, 1943. CPVN-rcs. Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Record Group (52) National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Md.
7. Two locally modified jeep ambulances were deployed to Guadalcanal at the start of the campaign; five factory modified jeep ambulances were used in the late stages of Guadalcanal.
8. BUMED History Division. "Iwo Jima." *S. Navy Medical Department Administrative History*. Vol. 1, Chapter XI, p59.
9. Moore Biographical Sheet. BUMED Archives.